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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of alcohol use on the transition experiences and development of eight female freshman college students. The theories developed by Erikson, Chickering, Perry, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart were examined and related to student development. A qualitative case study research design involved data collection by means of interviews and observation. Findings indicated that six of the students regularly participated in underage drinking and all described having poor academic guidance and feeling a sense of failure. Analysis of interviews with the students identified the following common themes: social activities, making new acquaintances, bonding with others in the residence hall, peer influence, responsibility for self, and academic pressures. Results suggested that: (1) social support networks should be established in academic settings to help foster student development; (2) drug education, drug-related student assistance, academic support services, and orientation should be developed to assist college freshmen; and (3) the issue of underage drinking should be addressed by all college departments. (Contains 63 references.) (Author/CK)

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College Student Development and Alcohol Use Among First Year Female College Students

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James M. Sottile, Jr.

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Abstract

This research examines the effects of alcohol use on female college student development. Eight first year female college students participated in the study, which utilized a comprehensive case study research design. A review of the theories created by Erikson, Chickering, Perry, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart are discussed as related to student development. Results indicate that relational networks (support networks which are social in nature) should be established in academic settings to help foster student development. Drug education classes, drug related student assistance programs, academic support services, and orientation classes for the first two semesters should be developed to aid healthy student growth. The issue of underage drinking should also be addressed by all college departments and dealt with from an educational/counseling perspective. Further implications are discussed throughout the paper.

Introduction

> Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to Great Places! You're off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go. You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care. About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there." With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you're too smart to go down any not-so-good street. And you may not find *any* you'll want to go down. In that case, of course, you'll head straight out of town. It's opener there in the wide open air. Out there things can happen and frequently do to people as brainy and footsy as you. And when things start to happen, don't worry. Don't stew. Just go right along. *You'll* start happening too. OH! THE PLACES YOU'LL GO! You'll be on your way up! You'll be seeing great sights! (T. Geisel and A. Geisel, 1990).

The above citation is about "going places" and experiences. It is a fictional account written in a poetic form, but the message it conveys is meaningful. You are about to read a story detailing the experiences of eight, first year female college students. It is a story told to me, by them, through numerous interviews, journal writing, and observations. These eight women have chosen to embark upon a journey which may have many paths. As "Dr. Seuss" has illustrated in his story about "going places" and echoed to me by the college women, the journey at college can be lonely, where one is on her own, while at the same time being able to see many "great sights."

There is a wealth of information available about the experiences of undergraduate college students (Horowitz, 1987). For example Lee (1970) surveyed 70 years of undergraduates' changing lifestyles. The scope of such research has become more specific in that the focus has changed to examine specific periods of time. Whereas Lee examined all four years of college life, Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates (1989) have studied the freshman year experiences of college students. It is during this period of time, first year of college, that a student is most likely going to drop out of college (Noel and Levitz, 1983). It is due to this reason, high drop out rate, that the first year was chosen in terms of student development. This paper is a discussion of how drug use, more specifically alcohol use, can impact human development.

Hill (1991) found that despite increases in the legal drinking age, between 82 and 92 percent of college students drink alcohol. Taking into account that 82 to 92 percent, 20 percent

may be considered heavy drinkers (Hill, 1991). Gleason (1994) believes that little attention has been paid to the drinking behavior of college women. Such behavior is often linked to making friends and establishing intimate relationships. Sexual assault has also been associated to alcohol use. Finley and Corty (1993) found that one in six women reported being sexually assaulted and "alcohol use was more commonly involved than was force" (p.1). It has been found that drug use is higher for college students with lower G.P.A.s than those who have higher G.P.A.s (Nam, 1994). Leibsohn (1994) also found that drug and alcohol use may be an important factor in choosing new college friends taking into account similar experiences during high school.

The majority of such studies in this area have examined the college experiences of men, but only a minority of researchers have exclusively studied the college experiences of women. What is known about the college student, "especially their lived experiences, is fragmentary and unsystematic" (Benjamin, 1991, p. 1). There is limited information that specifically examines the experiences of first year female college students (Fidler, 1993).

Theories have been developed which claim to represent and capture the experiences of both male and female undergraduate college students (Gilligan, 1977; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986). The major theories of college student development are primarily oriented toward the male undergraduate student (Belenky et al, 1986). Traditional views of college student growth have been developed through the examination of college males' lived experiences and then generalized to the experiences of females (Gilligan, 1977; Belenky et al, 1986). The significant theories addressing the development of college females take into account the lived experiences of female college students.

The most cited authors of the major theories of student development have been men. Belenky et al (1986) "believe that conceptions of knowledge and truth that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by the male-dominated majority culture. Drawing on their own perspectives and vision, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the guiding principles for men and women alike" (p. 5). Belenky et al (1986) further believe that the "omission of women from scientific studies is

almost universally ignored when scientists draw conclusions from their findings and generalize what they have learned from the study of men to lives of women. If and when scientists turn to the study of women, they typically look for ways in which women conform to or diverge from patterns found in the study of men" (p. 6).

I am going to reconsider the prominent theories of student development and view them in context. The context will be the transitional experiences of eight college women in the first and second semester of their first year. This discussion concentrates on alcohol use and student development.

Review of the Pertinent Literature

In order to understand the experiences of college students, it is vital to discuss student development. The student development movement was born following the end of World War II (Fenske, 1980). It was this movement that saw students as "developing organisms" (Wrenn and Bell, 1942) and called for new psychological theories in the area of college student development. It was the work of Nevitt Sanford (1962, 1967) that launched the college student development movement, by developing a theory of college student development.

The theories and models selected for review in this chapter have been the most cited and have received widespread attention in the literature or pertain specifically to female college student development (Pascarell and Terenzini, 1991). The authors of the theories to be discussed in this review of the pertinent literature include, Erikson, Chickering, Perry, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Belenky et al, and Eisenhart. The above authors have been divided into two forms of student development theories, traditional student development and female college student development. The theories designed by Erikson, Chickering, Perry, and Kohlberg are traditional in nature, in that, they do not fully capture the experiences of college women in their design. The theories or models authored by Gilligan, Belenky et al, and Eisenhart on the other hand are theoretically based on the experiences of college females.

Traditional Student Development

The theories developed by Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, William Perry, and Arthur Chickering are discussed in this paper as traditional theories of college student development. The theories are traditional in nature because they have been developed through the examination of male experiences and, in some instances female experiences, but they have been criticized for not accurately portraying the college experiences of women. It is also accurate to conclude that the major findings drawn from the traditional theories of college student development have been generalized to college women, even though college women were not accurately developed in the studies. The traditional theories of development will be briefly reviewed given the assumption that the reader has a background in student development.

Erikson

Psychosocial Development

When examining the experiences of young adult college students, many theorists have relied on the work of Erik Erikson (1950, 1968, 1980). Figure 1 outlines Erikson's stage theory. He defined "Identity versus Identity Diffusion" as a stage of adolescent development (Erikson, 1959). Erikson believed that a person who is in late adolescence and early adulthood begins to question his or her identity. Since the vast majority of undergraduate college students are in this age range, the psychosocial stage of "identity versus identity diffusion" is of most importance to this population. "Intimacy vs Isolation" will not be discussed because it typically occurs latter in college (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1965, 1966). It is during this time in life that the college student asks himself or herself, "Who am I?" If identity formation is not achieved, a young adult may temporarily overidentify, to the point of apparent complete identity loss (Erikson, 1959; Josselson, 1987).

Figure 1

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

1. Trust vs. Mistrust
2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
3. Initiative vs. Guilt
4. Industry vs. Inferiority

(College Student Years)

5. Identity vs. Identity Diffusion (Role Confusion)
6. Intimacy vs. Isolation

(Non-College Student Years)

7. Generativity vs. Stagnation
8. Integrity vs. Despair

(Erikson, 1950, 1968)

Erikson believed a young adult begins to question his or her identity at stage five. Erikson theorized that this occurs due to the "epigenetic principle," which states "anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole" (1968, p. 92). Basically, development occurs due to biological, social , and age - related influences interacting upon the individual. This questioning of one's identity leads either to a secure sense of one's self or to an ambiguous, diffuse understanding of self. As with each of Erikson's stages, in order for a person to grow, he or she must resolve a developmental crisis. If no resolution occurs, a person's psychosocial development could be unhealthy.

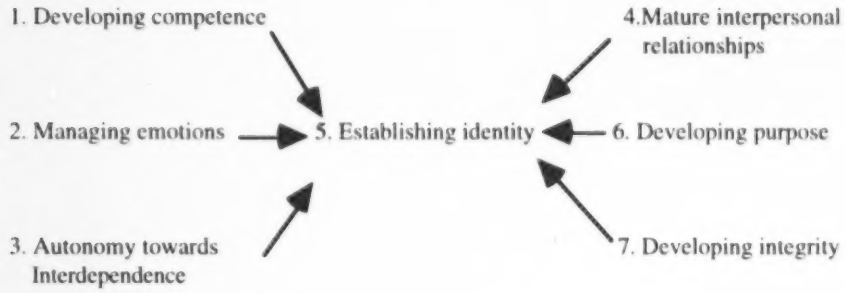
Chickering

Identity and Education

A leader in student development research is Arthur Chickering (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). Chickering (1969) proposed seven major areas of development which he labeled as vectors

of development. Chickering labeled them as vectors of development "because each seems to have direction and magnitude - even though the direction may be expressed more appropriately by a spiral or by steps than by a straight line" (Chickering, 1969, p. 8) (Refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2



(adapted by Widick, Knefelkamp, and Parker, 1980)

According to Chickering, when a college student arrives on campus, his or her first concerns are related to coping with academic material, meeting people, and taking care of daily tasks (vector 1). There is a shift from developing competence to managing emotions. The two primary emotions of a college student are aggression and sex. Conflict with a roommate may manifest itself as aggression while inappropriate sexual behavior is related to poor management of one's sexual emotions (vector 2). A student who is able to free himself or herself from parental and peer reassurance, affection, or approval is at the stage of developing autonomy (vector 3). The need for instrumental autonomy may be seen when a student has difficulty managing time and money.

Establishing identity (vector 5) depends on the first four vectors and it also fosters change in the final two vectors of student development. Chickering believes that the establishment of identity in a college student is directed to the student coming to terms with his or her physical appearance and sexuality. As a college student develops, he or she begins to tolerate diversity of individual and ideological differences. A student at vector five is able to recognize differences,

tolerate such differences, and appreciate their existence as seen in intimate relationships. The main goal of a student who is trying to "develop purpose" (vector 6) is to formulate plans and priorities for his or her life and to integrate avocational interests with vocational plans. The student begins to reflect upon future life goals. The development of integrity for a college student involves a shift from a dualistic (black and white) view of rules to a more relativistic position. The student begins to affirm his or her own value system and, in turn, acts in accordance with the values he or she has established. Integrity exists in relationship between the student's behavior and beliefs.

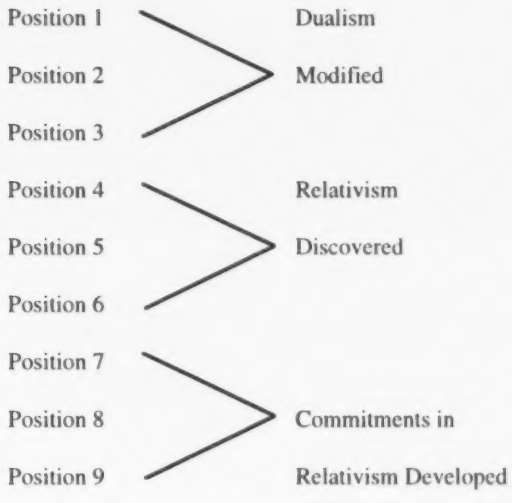
Perry

Intellectual and Ethical Development

Perry (1970) suggests that a person develops from a simplistic, right or wrong, categorical view of knowledge (dualistic view) to a more complex or pluralistic view, in which knowledge and truth can no longer be equated. Eventually the individual understands that truth is created through one's experiences and in order to establish an identity from these experiences, a person must make a commitment to a specific set of values. Perry labeled the last "category" of development as "relativism" because a person begins to come to terms with the content of his or her commitments and develops a sense of certainty in life. Perry labels these as positions because each "position" is identified as a location of cognitive development. Each position represents a different mode of "thinking."

Figure 3

Perry's Intellectual Development



Perry's "scheme" asserts that the developmental sequence of forms "manifests a logical order-an order in which one forms ideas to another through differentiations and reorganization required for the meaningful interpretation of increasingly complex experiences" (Perry, 1970).

During positions one to three, "Dualism Modified," the student views truth as right or wrong. The student believes that every question has an answer, and this answer, is correct. A college student at this level would have problems understanding conflicting points of view and would have little confidence in asserting his or her opinion. There is a shift in a student's development during the next three positions which have been labeled as "Relativism Discovered." The college student at this level believes that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion. A person's opinion is not objectively challenged because all views are seen as "right." As a student progresses, the capacity to think in a more complex manner is developed. The college student is able to draw assumptions and evaluate other points of views. Eventually, a student realizes that

there are no "correct" theories or absolutes in life.

Lastly, during positions seven through nine "Commitment in Relativism Developed," a college student develops an identity consistent with his or her own personal beliefs. A student begins to make a commitment in such areas as marriage, career, and in a specific set of values. The student establishes a sense of certainty through making numerous commitments in life. Diverse views are now balanced against a student's individually defined set of values.

Kohlberg

Moral Development

Another theorist's work applied to student development is that of Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg (1971, 1975, 1984) studied moral judgment as a process of various stages of development. He proposed a six stage theory of moral reasoning divided into three levels of moral development:

Level One: Preconventional Moral Reasoning. Judgment is based on personal needs and cultural rules.

Stage one: Punish and Obedience Orientation. Right and wrong behavior is determined by the physical consequences of the action.

Stage two: Instrumental-Relativist Orientation. One's personal needs (occasionally the needs of others) determine appropriate behavior.

Level Two: Conventional Moral Reasoning. Judgment is based on the expectations of one's family, society, or nation regardless of the perceived consequences.

Stage three: Interpersonal Concordance Orientation. Actions are evaluated by other persons approval and intentions.

Stage four: Law and Order Orientation. Appropriate behavior consists of showing respect to authority and maintaining social order.

Level Three: Postconventional Moral Reasoning. Moral values and principles are defined and have validity beyond those held by any individual person or group.

Stage five: Social Contract Orientation. Appropriate behavior is defined for the individual (or group) by standards agreed upon by society (e.g. U.S. Constitution).

Stage six: Universal Ethical Principle Orientation. Judgment is determined by individual conscience and involves abstract concepts of justice and equality.

In understanding how Kohlberg's theory of moral development relates to college student development, it is important to note that Kohlberg did not specifically develop his theory for college students. His theory takes into account all age groups and occupations. The theory and Kohlberg's ideas have been applied to student development. In an attempt to apply the theory to college students, level one "Preconventional Moral Reasoning," is typical of a person ten years old and younger. A first year student may begin moral reasoning at level two according to Kohlberg.

At level two "Conventional Moral Reasoning," the college student looks to his or her peers, in some instances to the family, for approval regardless of the perceived consequences. Loyalty is important and, at the college level, it may take the form of school loyalty (e.g. cheering on the football team), school support and peer support. A first year student is more likely to evaluate a person's intent, more so than his or her actions.

The student who is at the "Postconventional Moral Reasoning" level is one who has an abstract thought process that is capable of understanding the consequences of his or her behavior as related to the degree of personal responsibility. The student understands that his or her behavior is defined by standards set by society, the college or university, and in some instances, the student's instructor. Kohlberg has been openly criticized that his stage six is unattainable by the vast majority of the population (Eggen and Kauchak, 1992).

Female College Development

The theorists mentioned in the contexts of the prior section relied on the use of men's experiences to establish "norms" (Belenky et al, 1986). It is important to note that Erikson (1959) and Chickering (1969) examined the experiences of men and women but have misrepresented the experiences of women. Prominent theorists (e.g., Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart) in the area of female development have challenged the findings articulated by traditional, male oriented theorists. Theorists in the area of female development feel the findings drawn by these traditional theorists

are not representative to the experiences of college women. These norms have then been applied and generalized to the experiences of women. This is true of most discussions examining college student development and student experiences (Belenky et al, 1986).

For example, Erikson (1968) believed a young woman (e.g. college age female) established an identity through a man.

> Young women often ask whether they can 'have an identity' before they know whom they will marry and for whom they will make a home. Granted that something in the young woman's identity must keep itself open for the peculiarities of the man to be joined and of the children to be brought up, I think that much of a woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought. This, of course, is only the psychosexual aspect of her identity, and she may go far in postponing its closure while training herself as a worker and a citizen and while developing as a person within the role possibilities of her time (Erikson, 1968, p. 283).

Chickering's work on identity development of college students attending a four year college has also been challenged in terms of its validity as related to the female college experience (identity development). Hood, Riahinejad, and White (1986) questioned Chickering's belief that identity development (change) occurs during the first year of college. They also suggest that the "college environment may be promoting the development of identity in men to a greater extent than in women. The mixed messages women receive in college regarding career patterns, sex roles, and societal attitudes may cause women to develop identity at a slower rate" (Hood, Riahinejad, and White, 1986, p. 113). Straub and Rodgers (1986) found similar conclusions as stated by Hood and associates, in that, "evidence was found to support a sequence of developmental tasks for women that differed from Chickering's theory" (p. 216). More specifically, "women dealt with [Mature Interpersonal Relationships] tasks earlier and were further along in mastering and resolving this task than they did on the [Developing Autonomy[task. This constitutes a major difference from Chickering's theory" (Straub and Rodgers ,1986, p. 222)

In contrast to these traditional views of college student development, I will provide the theories of Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart to present a female oriented view of college student

development. Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart have taken into account the college experiences of women in the design of their respective theories. Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart move beyond the traditional theories of student development because they have directly studied the experiences of women. They attempt to capture the feminine voice as heard in context and shed light into a woman's construction of moral development.

Gilligan

A Different Voice

Carol Gilligan, a noted theorist in the area of women's moral development called for an increase in developmental theories examining the concerns and experiences of women. Gilligan questions, most notably, Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development due to the way Kohlberg scored female responses to moral conflicts. Gilligan (1977, p.489) states, "this repeated finding of developmental inferiority in women may, however, have more to do with the standard by which development has been measured than with the quality of women's thinking per se." The criticism with Kohlberg's stage scoring does not relate to the structural differentiation of his levels, but rather to questions of stage and sequence (Gilligan, 1977). The quarrel with Kohlberg's theory as related to female development pertains to the transition between stage three and stage four. More women than men have been scored at stage three as opposed to stage four (Gilligan, Kohlberg, Lerner, and Belenky, 1971). For women, this has been interpreted as signifying a lower level of moral reasoning. Gilligan believed that women may not always think in terms of right and wrong, but rather in terms of compromise and resolution. Women tend to value the approval of others (empathy and compassion) and their social system, which Kohlberg's scoring system does not take into account.

Gilligan's (1977, p. 516) thrust has been to illustrate the centrality of the concepts of:

> . . . responsibility and care in women's constructions of the moral domain, to indicate the close tie in women's thinking between conceptions of the self and conceptions of morality, and, finally, to argue the need for an expanded developmental theory that would include, rather than rule out from developmental consideration, the difference in the feminine voice. Such an inclusion seems

> essential not only for explaining the development of women, but also for understanding in both sexes the characteristics and precursors of an adult moral conception.

Generally, Gilligan (1979) believes that the theories representing the developmental life cycle have been modeled after male experiences, such models have failed to account for the experiences of women. Gilligan (1986) realizes a dissonance between psychological theory and women's experiences due to a lack of research in the area of female development. The theory describes a different voice for men and women characterized by themes. Such themes of college women include: "care and responsibility voice," and the "justice voice" (as interpreted by Kohlberg's theory). In resolving moral dilemmas, the care and responsibility voice stresses the connection between self and others, while others are seen in their own situation (Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983). The justice voice emphasizes effects on self rather than others. This voice sees others in terms of how we would like to be seen by them (Rodgers, 1989). The effects are evaluated through rules and principles of fairness and relationships of reciprocity (Rodgers, 1990).

The application of Gilligan's model to student development has three basic levels. As a student or woman progresses, she moves "from an egocentric through a societal to a universal perspective" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 483). At the first level, "Orientation to Individual Survival," the student is concerned about one's own self. As the student progresses developmentally, a transition occurs and the student has a stronger sense of responsibility for self and others. The second level, "Goodness as Self-Sacrifice," is characterized by a student who demonstrates a level of morality concerned with "caring for others" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 492). This may be seen when a student aids a fellow peer but during this process, the student who delivered the assistance may end up sacrificing her own needs to help her peer. It is at this stage that the "care voice" (Gilligan, 1977) emerges seeking to "resolve the conflict between selfishness and responsibility (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 34).

"Resolution is achieved at the third level ('The Morality of Nonviolence'), when an equilibrium is found between the expectations of conformity and caring in conventional notions of

womanhood and individual needs" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 34). "It is at this level, universal in nature, that a person or student condemns any type of exploitation and hurt" (Gilligan, 1977, p. 492).

As with all new theories and theories that dispute commonly held beliefs, Gilligan's views have been challenged and criticized. This holds true for Gilligan's work in adolescent development and psychoanalytic theory. Luria (1986) believes that Gilligan has oversimplified and overinterpreted the data from her theory which structures In a Different Voice. Kerber (1986) echoes Luria's position and warns against the study of psychological development through a dualistic lens (male/female-separate spheres). Such a view lends itself to oversimplification. It is further believed by Greeno and Maccoby (1986) that more research needs to be conducted: "A claim that the two sexes speak in different voices amounts to a claim that there are more women than men who think, feel, or behave in a given way. Simply quoting how some women feel is not enough proof."

Belenky

Women's Ways of Knowing

Another voice in the area of women's developmental issues is that of M.F. Belenky. Belenky et al (1986) believe that empowerment is an important issue in developing the power of one's (woman's) mind. Belenky et al (1986, p. 47) state "that [women] can strengthen themselves through the empowerment of others is essential wisdom often gathered by women."

The college women in Belenky et al's study (1986) echoed the themes: "Confirmation of the Self as Knower"; "Knowing the Realities: the Voice of Experience"; and "Freedom, Structure, and Tyranny of Expectation", as related to their educational experiences. The theme of "Confirmation of the Self as Knower" relates to a woman understanding or believing in her abilities to grow intellectually. "For women, confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development" (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 194).

"Knowing the Realities: The Voice of Experience" is understood when one understands

their experiences as reality. Experiences which were personal or concept related fostered a woman's understanding of reality. Abstractions which preceded experiences were difficult for the women to understand and ground in reality. Basically, abstract concepts or views, which were not part of a woman's personal experiences were difficult for her to understand. As Belenky et al (1986, p. 201) states; "Even the women who were extraordinarily adept at abstract reasoning preferred to start from personal experience."

Taking into consideration the theme of "Freedom, Structure, and Tyranny of Expectation," all of the women Belenky et al interviewed wanted some sense of structure in their educational community. When structure was not present, it was an excuse for self-indulgence and a lack of seriousness. Coupled with the need or call for structure was the lack of choices. The women expressed the desire to learn to make choices and to be free to learn what one wants to learn instead of being told what to learn. The college that operates according to a model of "housewifery" (respecting the students' own rhythms rather than imposing an arbitrary timetable) complimented and supported a woman's development (Belenky et al, 1986, 211). A woman felt more supported and developed more when a college established a model of "housewifery" than that of a college that did not establish such a model.

Eisenhart

Learning to Romance: Culture Acquisition in College

In understanding the experiences of college women, specifically first year women, Margaret Eisenhart outlines how women take meaning from culture and make it a part of who they are. Eisenhart (1990) describes this process as cultural acquisition in college.

> Cultural acquisition is described as stages of increasing individual expertise and identification with a given cultural system - stages in which access to the more advanced levels is limited by an individual's social relationships, a process with both positive and negative implications for individuals and with a developmental trajectory that can be discontinuous (p. 19).

Eisenhart's model is unique because it relates to how a woman takes meaning from her culture.

This is absent from the previous theories. Basically, the women Eisenhart interviewed acquired a new peer group and cultural system similar to the peer groups acquired in high school. Acquiring a peer group culture meant drawing more direction from a culture system already known, accepting portions of it as descriptive to their own situation, and condensing its meaning for their own use. Eisenhart (1990) also postulates a cultural model of romance. Briefly stated, a woman's attractiveness and prestige while on campus is validated by a man who finds her attractive and has a desire to date and treat her well. Prestige is gained and attractiveness is validated when men and women are attracted to the opposite sex.

Holland and Eisenhart (1990) believe a person's peer culture, in this case, college peer culture, plays a significant role in a woman's social development. Holland and Eisenhart (1990, p. 20) state,

> We began to see that gender relation, as constructed through the peer culture's emphasis on romance and attractiveness, had a great deal of significance in the women's lives. And we began to see that the women's patterns of opposition to patriarchy had to be interpreted in light of the importance of peers in conveying gender relations. We came to see that for women of the age we studied, it was peers, not school or community authorities, who were the primary mediators of gender oppression and patriarchy.

A note of caution is warranted when understanding Eisenhart's assumptions as they relate to the experiences of female college students. Eisenhart, as does Erikson, believes that the male plays a significant role in a woman's development. Eisenhart (1990) believes that a woman's attractiveness and prestige is validated by a man who finds her attractive and wants to date her. In this context, Eisenhart's view of female development subscribes to traditional standards. Women are not viewed as constructing their own experiences and reality but are viewed as acquiring culture from a male dominated society.

Eisenhart discusses how women acquire culture in a given peer group but this culture has already been defined within that college community. It is this college system, as Gilligan (1977) and Belenky et al (1986) posit, that is male oriented and designed by men. Eisenhart's views are grounded in traditional perspectives and are overly influenced by traditional theories.

Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart provide a female oriented view of college student development. Their beliefs go beyond the traditional views of college development because their research exclusively includes the experiences of college women. Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart expand developmental theories because they have examined women's experiences in the context of their college environment and in the feminine voice.

In summary, there have been developmental theories put forth and those developmental theories have been challenged by a new group of theorists who argue that you cannot generalize the experiences of men to women. Such generalizations have lead to a misrepresentation of theories pertaining to student development. Due to this misrepresentation in the prominent theories of college student development and this void in the literature, I believe there is a strong need for research examining the developmental process and experiences of college women.

Method

Echoed throughout the review of the literature, I discussed the experiences of college students, gender specific research, and themes of student development. Due to the void in the literature, the focus of this study was, therefore, twofold: 1) provide much needed data in the area of female development, and 2) identify and understand the experiences of first year college females.

Qualitative Approach

It was essential to have a methodology that invited participant involvement and expression, and that viewed the participants in the context of their lives. Qualitative analysis allowed me to use an interview and observation process which was driven by the context of the participants' college experiences. Qualitative research embraces the participants' feelings, ideas, emotions, and personal accounts. It generates a depth of perception and first person account (Denzin, 1989). The voices and actions of the participants were heard and seen in context; it is an emic study,

ideographic in nature (Denzin, 1989).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to provide thick description, connections, strands, themes, and webs of significance for the person or persons being studied (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative research goes beyond straight recording of facts and accounts. It introduces emotion, detail, context, and "webs of social relationships" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) that connect persons to one another. Such "thick description" evokes emotionality and self-feelings. "In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meaning, of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83).

For the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this research, I relied on grounded theory. Grounded theory is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As the name implies, theory or ideas are built from the ground up. According to Anselm Strauss (1987), grounded theory should not be treated as just a methodology, but as a "style of qualitative analysis" that facilitates the "development of theory (p. 5). Grounded theory provides a vehicle used to close the gap between abstract theories and rich description of the data (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979).

Research Question

The purpose of this research was to describe and better understand the transition experiences of first year women attending a university in a Mid-Atlantic state. Transition was defined as the period of time from the participant's first-semester arrival on campus to the end of the second semester. The main research question was: What do women experience during their first year (transition period) of college? From this main research question stemmed three sub-questions: 1) What is the nature of the social transition? 2) What is the nature of the educational transition? and 3) What meaning do women construct out of their first year experiences?

Participant Selection Strategy

The participants were selected through purposive selection. I went into two orientation

classes and an undergraduate Curriculum and Instruction class, introduced myself and explained the study. I asked for Caucasian female volunteers who were first or second semester, full time students, between the ages of 18 and 19 years old. Five women, who fit the stated criteria, raised their hands and stated they wanted to volunteer. The same procedure took place for the Curriculum and Instruction class. Three, second semester woman who fit all the criteria volunteered for the study.

Data Collection Strategy

The study involved four sets of interviews for each of the eight participants. The interview process relied on an open-ended, semistructured format. The participants were asked to keep a daily journal of their experiences. They were instructed to express, in their journals, their thoughts and feelings as related to their experiences at college. Along with the interviews and journals, the participants were observed at mutually agreed upon times in academic and social settings (Denzin, 1989; vanManen, 1990; Moustakas, 1990; Spradley, 1979; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

To insure authenticity of the data, I had multiple participants, multiple occasions of data collection, and multiple sources of data. This allowed for triangulation; multiple sources of data used to build trustworthiness in the data and analysis (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Contrary analysis is another process I used to insure authenticity. I tried to find data that would contradict the themes that I thought were beginning to emerge. For example, if a participant states she has no social friends in class, I would search all the data looking for examples of when a participant created social friendships in class. I would check for evidence that my interpretations represented the data.

All participants' interviews were transcribed verbatim and returned to the participants to check for accuracy. Once the transcriptions were reviewed by the participants, along with the observations (field notes) and journal entries, I then coded the data. In order to code the data, I examined the typed transcriptions, journal entries, and field notes one sentence at a time. Each cut-out statement was placed on an individual 5x8 index card. The index cards were then organized

by: participant's name, theme or metaphor of statement, and location in the data (first interview, date of journal entry, field note, etc.). Once I completed this process, similar statements were placed together to form themes. Throughout the entire investigation process, I shared the data collected with the appropriate participant to insure that a representative picture of her experiences was presented.

College Women In Their First Year

There were a total of eight first year (five first semester and three second semester), female college students who volunteered for the study. The students were enrolled full time at a university in a mid - Atlantic state. The university is a land-grant, doctoral degree granting research institution. All of the participants lived in the residence halls.

First Semester College Women

Paige (pseudonym) is an 18 year old Caucasian. Paige's hometown is outside of a major city in Pennsylvania about an hour and a half from the University. Paige describes her family life as "pretty good" and "We all get along really well...". Paige's parents are married and have been together for about 21 years. Paige has one older sister and one younger brother. While at the University, Paige lives in a populated residence hall with another female student. At the end of the first interview, Paige was interested in becoming a physical therapist. By the end of the first semester, Paige decided to change her major to human resource management.

Ellen (pseudonym) is also from the state of Pennsylvania and her hometown is close to a major city. Ellen, an 18 year old Caucasian, has two older sisters and an older step brother. She describes herself as the "baby of the family." Her parents are divorced and Ellen lives and spends more time with her mother. Ellen and Paige share the same residence hall room at the University. Ellen feels that Paige has become a significant friend during the end of high school and while at college. At the end of the last interview, Ellen wanted to graduate as a nurse.

Cheryl (pseudonym) is from a rural town in West Virginia about four hours from the university. Her parents are divorced and she has one younger sister. She describes her family as "great" and lives with her mother, step-father, and sister while at home. At the University, Cheryl lives in a populated residence hall. Cheryl was "very active" in high school and was class salutatorian at high school graduation. Cheryl told me that she is independent and loves helping people. During the last interview, Cheryl still wanted to be a nurse.

Megan (pseudonym) is an 18 year old Caucasian who is from a rural town in West Virginia. Her home town is three hours from the university and, while at home, she lives with her father and step-mother. Megan has one older biological brother and two step-brothers. During high school Megan said she had a 3.4 GPA but some of her high school acquaintances described her as a "scatter-brain." Her older brother attends the same university and she describes him as supportive and helpful with his advice. During the first interview Megan told me that at college she is able to meet many new people, compared to high school. Megan's overall goal is to graduate with a degree in interior or fashion design.

Sue (pseudonym) is an 18 year old Caucasian who is from the state of Virginia. She lives near a major city surrounded by numerous universities and it takes her about three and a half hours to drive home. Her parents are divorced and Sue has one half brother who is five years old. Sue lives with her mother, step-brother, and step-father when at home. Sue describes herself as an average student with a 2.3 GPA. During the first and last interviews, Sue was consistent with her graduation goal, "to own my own studio, dance studio."

Second Semester College Women

Karen (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 18 year old. Her hometown is in New Jersey with a population of about 89,000. Karen's hometown in outside of New York City, and she lives near a number of major universities. Karen lives about seven hours from home and mentioned to me that she does not get home often. Her parents are married, and she has a younger sister and older

brother. She described her family as middle class. While at college, Karen lived in a populated residence hall and had one female roommate. She described her parents as supportive of her college experiences and as being "fair and open." Karen does not describe herself as an academic person but feels she "can do better in her classes." She states she is "B" student who is more social in nature than academic. Karen had a well established social network at home compared to a more fragmented social network at college. Upon graduation, Karen would like to be a Special Education teacher because she loves working with children.

Stacy (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 18 year old. Her hometown is in Delaware with a population of 2,400. She lives near a major city surrounded by numerous universities. Stacy lives about five hours from home and would like to "get home more often." Stacy told me that her parents are married and that she has three brothers. One brother is her fraternal twin, and the other two brothers are twins. Stacy states that her parents gave her "a lot of independence while growing up." Throughout the interview process and journal entries, Stacy expressed her concern about her mother's poor physical health. Stacy describes herself as an average "C" student who is more social than academic in nature. Stacy's long-term goal is to be an Elementary Education teacher because she "really enjoys working with young children."

Betty (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 18 year old. Her hometown is in West Virginia with a population of 18,000. She does not live near any major cities nor universities. Her hometown is considered rural, and she lives about 1 1/2 hours from a major city. Betty lives about an hour from the college and "tries" to get home as often as possible. When at home, Betty lives with her parents and brother. Betty does not associate with hometown high school classmates because she feels they lack understanding and do not accept diversity. She states that she feels "pretty good about herself" and describes herself as an "A" student. Betty does not hesitate going out to enjoy the social life but is also able to balance academic requirements. At the time of the last interview and journal entry, Betty wanted to change her major (Education) but was undecided upon a new major.

The Experiences of being a Student

The narrative is drawn from what the women have described as significant college experiences. It is these aspects and experiences that the college women attach meaning as they go through the transition. From this extensive volume of data, I have analyzed and categorized their experiences into seven themes. These themes include; "Going Out in College," "Meeting People in College," "The Residence Hall as Community," "The Impact of College Friends," "On Your Own: The Responsibility of Being Mature," "Learning to be Independent," and "Academic Pressures of College." As I discuss each theme, I will carry the reader through significant aspects of the women's lives. These are the aspects that the women have attached meaning in the construction of their reality.

The themes discussed in the paper are not distinct categories, nor do they occur in a linear fashion. They are discussed as separate themes to allow the reader a clear understanding of the experiences of first year female college students. The college experiences of these women do not occur as totally separate experiences; they occur more holistically. Although my discussion does not fully capture their total lives, I do discuss what the women expressed as significant. These issues that emerged as the most significant experiences in their lives are discussed as themes. The lives of Megan, Sue, Cheryl, Ellen, Karen, Stacy, Betty and Paige dealt with numerous experiences taking place at one time and were continuous in nature. Below, I provide a brief introductory definition and example of the eleven themes.

Being a College Student

1. Going Out In College
   Definition: A participant leaving her residence hall room to engage in a social activity. *Example*: Sue going to a fraternity party.

2. Meeting People In College
   Definition: A participant introducing herself or being introduced to a person she has not met before. *Example*: Megan meeting a person from her floor.

3. Community In The Residence Hall

Definition: A participant forming relational bonds which are social in nature. This usually occurred in the residence hall. *Example*: Paige's description of her friends on her floor as that of a "family".

4. The Impact of College Friends
Definition: The support provided by a friend and how such support influenced a participant. *Example*: Cheryl's description of her friends as being "helpful" and "supportive".

5. On Your Own: The Responsibility of Being Mature
Definition: A participant learning to be responsible for her actions free of constant parental oversight. *Example*: Megan learning to do her housework free of parental structuring.

6. Learning to be Independent
Definition: A participant learning to develop free of parental control. *Example*: Paige learning to do her own laundry.

7. Academic Pressures of College
Definition: A participant's feelings and actions related to academic activities. *Example*: Cheryl dropping a class.

Being A College Student

The most prominent themes dealt with the social nature of the participant's lives. Paige, Sue, Ellen, Cheryl, Megan, Stacy, Karen, and Betty engaged in behaviors that were more social than academic in nature. The participants discussed three basic themes related to being social, they included "going out," "meeting people," and "establishing friendships." The themes to be discussed in this paper will be "going out" and "meeting people" due to the relationship to alcohol use. Six of the eight participants engaged in underage drinking which they reported most frequently when they "went out" and "met other people." Due to this fact, the discussion will revolve around these two themes, even though all parts of the participants lives were effected by the alcohol use.

Going Out In College

Paige, Ellen, Sue, Karen, Stacy, Betty, Megan, and Cheryl along with other residents from their floor, enjoyed "going out" into the university and city community. Part of being a college

student involved going out to social activities. Such activities involved going to Greek parties, bars, and private parties. The process of "going out" was a group activity that involved the input of everyone in the group. It was a planned process that involved a specific outcome. That outcome was to have a "good time."

A typical outing for Paige, Ellen, and their friends from the residence hall started by either Ellen or Paige calling a friend or meeting a friend in the floor lounge to create a plan. The bars they decided to visit usually had some type of drink special that night. Paige and Ellen always went out with at least one other person but it normally was with a group of friends from their floor. Paige states,

> Usually a group of us go out and we usually go to the clubs down town and we always dance . . . Well they're all like in kind of like a little circle or whatever. So we usually like go in [to a bar] and just before we pay to get in we look and see if there are a lot of people there and just like whoever is having specials.

Ellen described a similar situation as did Paige. Ellen had a friend from her floor who would read the university newspaper and write down the bars having drinks specials that night. The places with the best deals were the places they went to first. Once they decided upon a bar, Paige and Ellen would usually obtain a ride with a floormate who had a car. From their residence hall to downtown is about a three mile trip. Paige and Ellen would usually leave to go to the bars with a group of female friends, and then meet their male floormates at the bar. Paige stated that "the girls go out together and the guys go out together," but the females are typically a separate group from the males. Ellen had a slightly different picture then Paige. Ellen felt more people were involved in going out. Ellen described "going out" as getting the "whole gang together." Ellen states,

> Get the whole gang together. We usually travel in a mob or whole floor. It's usually like a posse and we go down town like decide where to go to a frat or a bar or something . . . Probably, well at least like six probably. But then Saturday night there was, I think our whole floor. There were like twenty kids there . . . Well when there is like five, they're all girls but then like if it's like ten then maybe one or two guys will be there but if there's twenty it's like half and half like about you have guys go out sometimes . . . Now if it's like a place to dance, then we'll like dance and drink, meet people, talk to people.

"Going out" was an experience that Paige, Sue, Ellen, Karen, Stacy, Betty, Megan, and Cheryl described throughout the entire semester. Paige felt she could do without "going out" but she went out to have fun and be with her friends. Near the beginning of the semester to mid-semester, Paige would go out to bars. When Paige was at a bar she would drink and dance. Paige described herself as a "social" drinker and felt it "kinda looks stupid to go to a bar and not drink." As the semester progressed, Paige met a lot more people when she went out. Paige states, "I love to be around people and so whenever you go out there is always a lot of people."

When Ellen went out, as did Paige, she enjoyed being with other people. When Ellen was out at a bar or "frat" party she enjoyed "dancing." Paige gained energy from other people and enjoyed a diversity of friends. She would usually go to a "frat" party or bar. Paige described her favorite social setting as a frat party. She had this to say, "I like frat parties because they're so big. There is so many people and they usually have bands and stuff like that." Paige found it fun to go out because it allowed her the opportunity to meet other people. Paige had this to say, "Just getting to know other people. Going out to new places. They aren't the same places you went out at home."

By Thanksgiving recess, Ellen found more enjoyment when she went out to private, smaller parties. Ellen states, "Sometimes I just like going up to someone's house with other people instead of big parties and stuff. Just having a party at someone's house."

Both Paige and Ellen did not retire for the evening once they returned from "going out." Ellen describes what took place, "[We] either order pizza, sit in the lounge, we're up like when we get back we're up for like another two hours sitting there." By the end of the semester Paige described to me what another person would report about her behavior during the first semester. Another person would report that Paige "went out a little too much," "slacked off a lot in [her] classes," and "had fun the whole semester."

Sue greatly enjoyed going out. Early in the semester Sue described how she felt about her experiences to date. Sue said she "loved" college, liked to "party", and enjoyed the amount of

activity that was available at college. She described how she felt,

> I love it here. I love it here. It's great . . . like the partying and there is always something to do . . . And the people some of the people are really nice . . . Well, since I've been here, I think I've partied every day except maybe two or three so, so far I'm doing OK.

About a month into the semester, Sue continued to go out often. Sue felt she was still getting adjusted to college and needed to "slow down." She also fully understood that it was not "very good" to continue to go out every night. Sue had this to say,

> Everyone is still getting adjusted. Lord knows I need to slow sown. I go out every night and drink. That's not very good and I know that. I saw and partied with my friend that goes here last weekend. He's a sophomore and in [a frat]. I like them, they're cool.

Sue continued to go out as the semester progressed. She described going out to bars more so than "frat" parties. Sue enjoyed dancing, as did Ellen and Paige, when she was at a bar. Sue would normally start conversing with her friends from her floor and then meet new people when she was out on the dance floor. Sue describes what she does when she goes out and how she start a conversation with a person,

> I don't go to many frat houses though. At the bars we just go and we just start talking amongst ourselves, I guess, and then we just start dancing. Because we are at [a bar] and we'll dance and I'll just meet people from there. Like I'll walk by, and a big hey, and I'll just start talking to them.

When Sue is at a bar or in the residence hall, she said she enjoys talking to men. Sue also explained that she "gets along" with men in a more enjoyable manner than women. Sue felt that when she walked into a bar the women tend to give her an unpleasant look. By mid-semester Sue began to echo concerns about the effects of "going out" had on her general performance. Sue states, "I think I've burned out really fast." Sue began to realize that she could not "go out" every night to a bar and still make an eight-thirty class. Sue felt the need to go out often to "get away", to

"get away" from academics and people. Sue wanted to meet new people and just "relax" when she was out. Sue gave the following reasons for "going out " so often,

> Probably just to get away from academics and being at my desk or being in my dorm. It's more of a get away kind of . . . just get away from everybody, you know, go out with my friends . . . just meet new people and . . . to relax. Just have fun that kind of stuff.

As the semester progressed, I began to know more about each of the participants. It became apparent that when Sue went out to bars or "frat" parties she regularly drank alcohol. She felt she was able to "handle" the amount of alcohol she drank and had this to say about her alcohol consumption,

> Well it just depends because my tolerance is, I don't know. It just depends. My tolerance is kind of high . . . one night I could drink five beers and just be drunk and then another night I took seventeen shots and I was drunk but . . . Yeah, I was drunk. But I could have done more, you know, and then like I was drinking a half a bottle of rum actually this past weekend and I was fine . . . So I mean it just depends as I guess I can handle my alcohol a lot like, I know when I have had too much and I know when OK I'm going to be sick.

Sue was also receiving feedback from her friends that she was "always drinking " and "always out partying." Her friends were beginning to think she was a "waste case". By the end of Fall, Sue realized she was an alcoholic or had the physical characteristics of an alcoholic. In her journal writing Sue states, "I'm turning into an alcoholic and pot smoker." Sue had prior insight into the behaviors of an alcoholic. Sue's biological father is an alcoholic, as well as, Sue's grandparents and their parents. Sue had this to say,

> Oh well I am an alcoholic. My body is and I am an alcoholic . . . There is no, you know my dad is, his dad is, my mom's dad is, his dad is. It's, it's there [alcoholism].

Sue understood that her drinking had an impact on her ability to be a college student. Even though Sue felt she could control her drinking, she began to experience a number of effects when not

drinking. When Sue was not drinking, she would "get the shakes." At first, Sue felt she was diabetic, but recalled that her father had the same symptoms when he was not drinking. Sue described the impact of her alcohol use and her belief that she was able to control its usage.

> I think I receive more effects of it [alcohol] than my dad does or anybody else because it's in both of my generations . . . Both of the cells, so I mean sometimes I'll be just sitting around and I'll get the shakes, because I'll need it [alcohol] . . . That scares me a lot. It really does because I don't know what to do about that . . . it's really uncomfortable because it make you dizzy. It makes you feel faint . . . it's so unfair because I didn't ask for it . . . I don't think it will ever get out-of-hand [alcohol use]. Because I know I control myself and the liquor and stuff like that. It's not a problem for me. It's just the shakes because I thought I was like diabetic or something. Because my aunt said, well drink some juice or something and it wasn't. And it clicked in my head that maybe this is what it is . . . I know that's what it is. There is no other thing that I can think of. Because I know my dad used to get the shakes a lot and he'd always be drunk . . . I know he got the shakes a lot and it just clicked in my head . . . except that's so unfair . . . I'm just going to ride it out. I mean, I usually take something to calm me down but that's another bad thing.

By the end of the semester, Sue felt she was not an alcoholic like her father. Sue felt an alcoholic was someone who was "physically abusive" and destructive. She felt she was not this type of person. Sue believed that "nothing bad was going to happen" to her even though she drank.

Megan and Cheryl did not describe nor experience the intensity of alcohol use as Sue described. Cheryl did not "go out" to drink alcohol because she did not enjoy drinking. Cheryl, went out to have "fun". Cheryl said she tried alcohol in the past but did not enjoy the experience. Drinking alcohol was not part of Cheryl's "going out" behavior. Cheryl went out to "dance" and have "fun." Cheryl usually decided to "go out" around eleven or twelve midnight. This time was chosen because she felt "the good music starts playing" at this time. Most of the time Cheryl went out with more males than females because she felt more "protected" being around male friends. She felt it was "dangerous" for her to "run around campus" by herself. Cheryl also was concerned about her physical safety when returning from "going out." Cheryl would leave a bar in enough time to secure a ride on the bus back to the residence hall complex. If she missed the bus she would take a taxi. Cheryl also felt that going out helped relieve stress.

Even though Cheryl said she did not go out often, Cheryl felt that going out with her

friends was a significant experience. Cheryl states, "Probably going out on the weekends and having fun with my friends." This same belief was also written throughout Cheryl's journal. Cheryl also learned that she did not enjoy being "responsible" for her friends when they had too much to drink or became intoxicated. Cheryl felt responsible for their safety when returning to the residence hall. Cheryl states,

> Yeah, like when I go out with people, I always have to bring people home and I don't know, I'm like, I'm their friend and everything. But I don't want to be responsible for them. You know what I mean? And I just wish that, I don't know . . . it just takes forever to get them home and everything.

As Paige, Ellen, and Sue have mentioned or implied, they all felt that they went out too much during the semester. Cheryl came to this same conclusion. If Cheryl had the ability to change the past, she would have gone out "much" less on the weekends. Cheryl had this to say, "I probably wouldn't go out as much on the weekend." Also at the end of the first semester, Cheryl realized that college and "going out" can be a lonely experience. Cheryl enjoyed going out but did not enjoy returning home alone to the residence hall after an evening downtown. All of Cheryl's friends stayed out later than Cheryl, as well as, made new friends that evening. Cheryl writes in her journal,

> One of the worst nights I've had since I've been at school. Three of us went out and I was left by myself all night. I cried on the way home.

Megan also described a lot of situations when she went out. When Megan and her friends went out they would usually go to a bar. About a month into the semester Megan expressed concern about the number of men that would ask her to dance. When Megan was talking to her friends or in the process of heading to the bathroom, men would consistently try to ask her to dance. Megan also began to dislike the amount of smoke and the temperature of the bar. Megan also described, as did Cheryl, that she enjoyed "going out" to relieve stress. Meeting people and being with people she knew in a social situation was stress relieving for Megan. Megan began to

dislike going out to bars by mid-semester. She preferred to go to private parties where she knew a number of the people present. Megan describes the following situation,

> I said I like to go to people's parties, like people I know. To their parties, not bars, where I don't really know anybody. And it's really like a meat market at bars I think.

Megan was sensitive to the approach many of the men initiated when they asked her to dance at bars. Megan did experience a situation, in which she felt uncomfortable while returning to the residence hall with a male acquaintance she met at a bar. It was mid-semester and Megan described an uncomfortable situation she found herself in:

> Well I went out a couple weeks ago and I was [at a bar] . . . This basketball player came in there that is on the team here. I met him a couple years ago and he was just like. He wasn't drinking anything and I wasn't drinking anything either. He was well, I'll give you a ride home back to [the residence hall], and he had a bunch of friends with him. I was well OK, you know. I was like why not? He's not drinking anything and I know him. So then he was like well do you want to come back to my place and watch a movie, you know. It was just like 'oh no' and so, and I was like well he's on the basketball team, you know, like well he must be a pretty nice guy. So then I went back there and he found out I wasn't that type of person and he got mad and immediately took me back. . . . He said well do you want me to take you back and I just said yes and so he just took me back. No questions asked and . . . Oh yeah, I never heard from him again and then he had the nerve to ask for my phone number and he never called . . . Yeah ,when he dropped me off he said, by the way can I have your phone number. I was well, OK, you know. So I gave him my phone number and he never called.

Stacy enjoyed going out to bars, house parties, and "Frat parties." Karen's going out behavior was more of a passive process. She did not drink alcohol but enjoyed watching people at the bar; "I rarely drink. I watch a bunch of drunk people make fools of themselves, listen to music, dance, play cards. The process of "going out" for Betty and staying out late ("until 3:00 every night") was a way for her to know people, acquire friends, in turn, learn about or formulate a social identity. Betty's social identity was tied to the people she met and classified as friends. Staying out late, talking to newly met friends, and listening to music was part of Betty's identity. Betty states:

> "There are bars, but the bars we go to they play music, so we don't drink because we have to sign a paper when we go in saying we're not going to drink. So we just go listen to music. I don't know where I go when I get home at 6:00 in the morning. I went to a park one night and sat on a picnic bench and talked for hours."

In some cases the process of going out was not pleasurable. Karen did not enjoy going to places where she did not know a group of people:

> "It's like, going somewhere where you know the people, if you do something, they're not going to look at you like you have two heads or something. I guess there's always a sense of, is everybody looking at me? Is everyone watching me?"

Stacy enjoyed going to the bars and socializing with friends. This was part of Stacy's identity. She met new friends and "relieved stress" with her present friends. Throughout the academic year, Stacy increased the number and length of time she spent at the bars with her friends. Stacy provides the following description of what she does when she "goes out":

> "When we [friends] go out, we usually go out to [a local bar] on Wednesdays; we'll go out. It's just been this thing all year. Wednesday night was ladies night somewhere, so we go out. Because none of us have class until really late on Thursday. Like my first class is at 2:00 pm. We go out and we bring a deck of cards, and even if it isn't ladies night we're like, 'It's girl night out,' and we'll bring a deck of cards, drink, and smoke cigarettes, that's what we do all night. And we just have a ball, like, laughing at things that happened the previous weekend. Just going out and having a good time. We go out to have a good time. . . we don't go looking for a good time. "

This behavior eventually began to interfere with healthy college behavior. Stacy discussed in her journal the decrease in her G.P.A. due to the amount of "partying" behavior. Stacy began to question if she was alcoholic or just misused alcohol. Stacy writes in her journal:

> "Thursday is the Big Night. We all find out whether or not we are alcoholics."

Stacy realized that her drinking behavior was unhealthy and she did not want to continue on such a dangerous path. Stacy did not want to discontinue going out but understood the need to change

her current behavior. Stacy's identity was associated with wanting to have a "good time" drinking alcohol. For example, Stacy "hung out" with people who drank. Drinking alcohol while "hanging out" and "partying" was part of Stacy's identity.

The participants began to regret the amount of time they spent going out and the lack of time spent on their class assignments. However, "going out" did allow the women to meet new people and experience new activities free of parental control. "Going out" was a vehicle for the women to explore their environment. They were learning to balance this sense of autonomy between the experiences of going out and their academic activities.

Meeting People In College

Going out was a process by which Karen, Stacy, Betty, Ellen, Paige, Sue, Cheryl, and Megan were able to "meet people." Meeting people was an important part of being a college student. It allowed the participants to form new relationships and to experience diverse relationships among different groups of people. When Paige arrived at college she did not know too many people. Her roommate, Ellen, was her best friend from high school. Outside of this relationship, Paige began to meet and acquire new friendships in the residence hall. Paige had this to say about her experiences in the residence hall,

> You just learn how to deal with people and how like to meet new people and stuff like that and you make a lot of new friends.

Paige continued to discuss times when she would meet "new" people. When Paige did meet a new person and became friends with them, she felt it was nice to have them there "if you need them." Ellen also felt that meeting people led to a process of support. The more people you met, the more chances of having friends. Ellen believed that "meeting people" was important because you "could make friends." Paige found that she met more people on her floor than at a bar or fraternity party. Even though Paige describes meeting people at fraternity parties, she consistently talked about meeting people in the residence hall. She provided the following description,

> You meet people [at] like a bar or something like that, but you never see them again. It's mostly just the people that are on your floor that you see every day . . . You meet a lot of new people at frat parties and stuff like that. People come up to you and talk to you.

Ellen had similar experiences as Paige and felt she met a lot of people at "frat" parties but also consistently mentioned that she maintained more lasting friendships from the people she met on her floor. Ellen told me she liked to dance and when she was dancing met a lot of people at the bars downtown. Ellen also believed, as did Paige, that you could meet "new" people at "frat" parties. As Ellen put it, "I like frats. You meet more people there I think." Ellen and Paige enjoyed going out because they could "meet new people" and "be with their friends." Cheryl found great pleasure in meeting people when she went out. As did Ellen, Cheryl also met people on the dance floor at the local bars.

Sue had very similar experiences, when she met new people, as those mentioned by Ellen, Paige, and Cheryl. Sue also met a lot of people from her floor or the residence hall complex and private parties. Sue had this to say about meeting people on her floor,

> Well, my dorm like the people on my floor, they're like cool, I've met like a lot of like close friends on my floor and we all go out together and stuff and that's fun . . . We went to a bar and it was I mean it's fun because everyone is just they because everyone is just there to meet people and have fun. So it's like a different situation that everyone is just trying to meet everyone so you meet so many people every time you go out.

Sue also preferred private parties over bars when it came to "meeting people." Sue felt it was easier to meet people at a private party. She found that her friends would introduce her to their friends, in turn, Sue had the opportunity to meet a lot of new people. Sue describes the situation,

> . . . I would probably know more people at a party . . . and it was easier actually to meet people at a party. That's what I think because you have your circle of friends and those friends will know some from the other and you just meet more people that way, I think.

Sue enjoyed meeting new people because it helped her to adjust to being at college. She also believed that meeting people was important because it allowed her to feel comfortable and "kind of important." Sue describes the following situation:

> It helps like . . . Helps get adjusted, I guess, to feel comfortable I think. If, when I meet more people, you know, and I have more familiar surroundings it makes me feel more comfortable and kind of important . . . comfortable. I don't know, if you walk into a room and you don't know anyone you kind of feel stupid.

Early in the Fall semester, Megan often spoke about the numerous people she met at college. Before arriving at college, Megan did not feel comfortable introducing herself to strangers. This behavior quickly changed because Megan enjoyed meeting new people. She had this to say about meeting new people, "Well I used to, I liked to meet, I would never go up and just meet somebody, introduce myself and now I really like to meet new people."

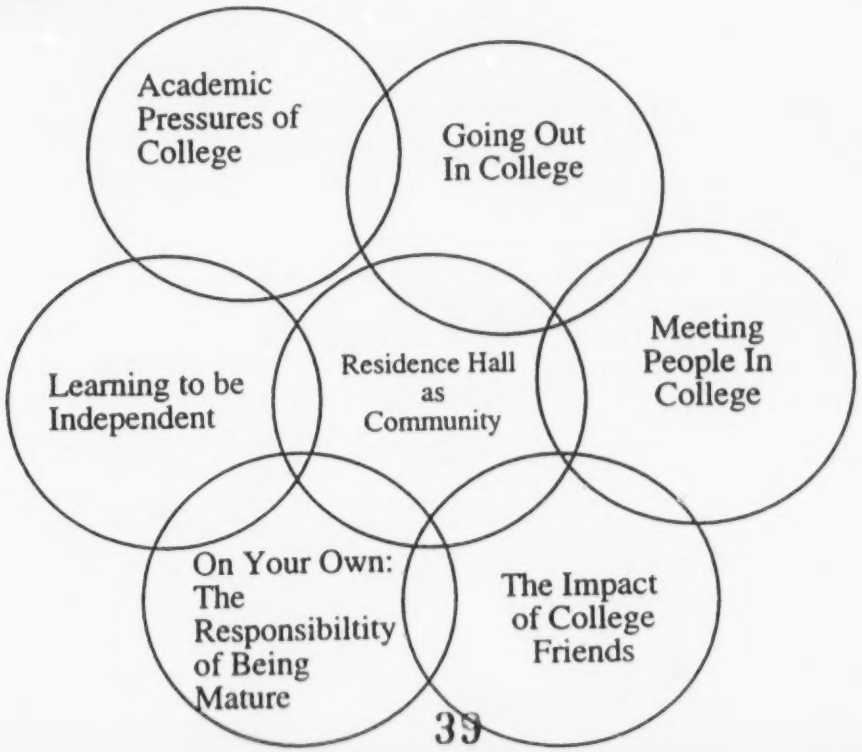
Once at college the participants described a number of common activities or experiences. "Going out" allowed the participants to "meet people." "Meeting people" allowed the eight women to form a sense of "community" in the residence hall. Karen, Betty, Stacy, Sue, Megan, Cheryl, Paige, and Ellen also were wrestling with being more independent but at the same time also enjoyed the safety of relying on other people for assistance (dependence). The participants were learning to be responsible outside the parental structure they were accustomed to while living at home. Lastly, and about mid-semester, the participants began to question their academic competence and were having trouble balancing their social activities in relation to their academic activities. It was from about mid-semester on the participants realized that they had to be responsible students in order to be successful at college. College was about "going out," "meeting people," having friends, and forming social networks while attending classes at the university.

Discussion

Themes as related to the research questions

College Women's Experiences

The main research question states, "What do women experience during their first year of college"? Megan, Sue, Paige, Karen, Betty, Stacy, Ellen, and Cheryl described their college experiences around this question in relation to seven themes. "Going Out in College" allowed the participants to "Meet People," in turn, "Friendships" were born. These three themes while usually discussed in this order, should not be considered stages. They are more experiences that are connected to one another. Each theme represents a circle, not having a specific beginning or end, that is connected or linked to another theme, with the exception of "Academic Pressures." All the themes are linked by the participants' descriptions of having a sense of "Community," once again with the exception of "Academic Pressures" (Refer to figure 4). This was central to all the participants because this idea of community was part of the remaining five themes ("Academic Pressures" is not included).


Academic Pressures of College
Going Out In College
Learning to be Independent
Residence Hall as Community
Meeting People In College
On Your Own: The Responsibiltity of Being Mature
The Impact of College Friends

It was rare to find a social network, academic in nature, to support a participant's academic activities. The participants also felt they were less dependent upon their parents and more independent in terms of taking care of their daily activities ("Learning to be Independent)". They were learning to be independent given the support of their community.

Nature of the Transition

The participants described the transition from the beginning of the first semester until the end of that same semester in mostly social terms. Social relates to "going out," "meeting People," and "having Friends." The only theme that pertained directly to the academic facet of life related to the participants' description of their fear of academic failure ("Academic Pressures"). All of the other themes were socially oriented because they related to facets of college life that were based in or required interactions with other people. The participants do not apply this meaning to their academic life.

The students' social activities encompassed and affected a large part of their daily activities. It bridged all aspects of college life except the academic. Hirsch (1979) in his examination of college students found similar results in that women engaged in a greater amount of time than males in creating interpersonal relationships and social networks. The social themes ("Going Out," "Meeting People," "Friendships") were pervasive aspects of the participants' lives. Brower (1990) found similar findings in that first year college students rated "making friends" (social experiences) as a more prominent domain (life-task) than getting "good grades." Being social was a form of empowerment that connected and gave their experiences meaning. In order to be social, the participants sought to meet new people in the residence hall or in some type of social activity. This was a vehicle to meet new people and bridge social networks. The experiences and stress of college no longer seemed to be individual experiences, but common in nature. The participants were no longer alone; they had allies who understood their similar fears and concerns.

Ellen, Sue, Megan, Cheryl, Karen, Stacy, Betty and Paige started to form friendships in

their first semester at college. The friendship was with a person to whom they would tell their inner thoughts and feelings. It was someone they could rely on for support. In most cases it was a person they met in the residence halls who had similar experiences and ideas. These were friends who were together because they were traveling down the same path, taking the same journey. It was through these common experiences that kinship was born.

With the passage of time, a sense of responsibility grew within each participant. Paige, Sue, Cheryl, Karen, Betty, Stacy, Ellen, and Megan came to understand the need to be responsible adults during the transition process or face the consequences of failure. Upon arrival on campus, the lack of parental monitoring was novel, but the reality of self discipline and self management would become paramount for each of the women. For example Paige, at the beginning of the semester was unable to do her laundry. By the end of the semester she now had the ability to organize her career goals by deciding to transfer to another college which she felt had a better program in her major.

The Meaning of Experiences

"What meaning do women construct out of their first year experiences"? Each theme describes a facet of experiences related to the development of each participant. For example, "Going Out in College" was a common experience of all the participants. The meaning the participants placed on this activity related to being social and interacting with one's culture.

Who these women are is related to their social context. Their social context is the community in which they live. Within this community the women described being social as "going out," "meeting people," and "establishing friends." They established a social network (relational network) when they engaged in social activities. A relational network is described as a "social" relationship established by the participant which tends to be supportive in nature. But, when the women engaged in academic activities, for example being in class, the women did not establish a strong and enmeshed relational network. It is important to note that "being social" is viewed in the context of having or forming relationships, basically, doing something with other people. This

rarely occurred or was not described as significant by the participants as related to the academic facets of life.

During the participants first few weeks at college they started to establish relational networks within the social aspects of their community. The women did not see the development of a relational network as being important in the academic aspect of their community. The women developed a relational network to help manage the social aspects of their community. For example, all of the participants went out socially, established social friends, and kept commitments related to being social.

The other meanings that the participants constructed from their experiences related to their academic life in the community. They viewed this life as separate from their social activities. For example, a participant did not go to a bar alone, but she did attend the majority of her classes alone. Academic activities were viewed by these women as being individual processes. The participants did not see as an issue the need to establish a strong relational network addressing the academic aspects of their lives. Also, the participants described situations where they were not satisfied with the manner in which they managed their academic activities. For example, a participant would "skip" class or not do the assigned homework to the point of where their grade was affected. All of the participants stated that they did not establish strong "friendships" in class. Actually, the participants described the "friends" they met in class as "acquaintances."

In summary there are two main issues that need to be addressed when discussing female student development. The first main issue dealt with establishing effective relational networks related to academic activities, in the same sense that they formed relational networks for their social activities. The second issue dealt with the need for the participants to form better management skills related to their academic activities.

Conclusions

When I reflect upon the experiences of Karen, Betty, Stacy, Sue, Cheryl, Megan, Ellen, and Paige, a number of disturbing issues are present. Six out of the eight participants regularly

engaged in underage drinking. None of the participants made a commitment to an identity (Erikson, 1968). All described having poor academic guidance and feeling a sense of failure. Their academic programs lacked strong and established relational networks because they were unable to create similar social networks in their academic environments.

The participants described a number of significant experiences during their first semester. Karen, Betty, Stacy, Paige, Ellen, Sue, Megan, and Cheryl enjoyed going out and meeting new people. This mostly occurred in the residence hall and during social activities. Once they met new people, relationships were fostered and friendships were established. The friendships that developed in the residence hall became enmeshed and social networks were created. The participants felt a sense of community with their cohorts from the residence hall.

Karen, Betty, Stacy, Ellen, Megan, Paige, Sue, and Cheryl described having a supportive social network but this same social network was also detrimental to development. The participants described going out as an activity that occurred the entire semester. By the end of the semester the participants felt they went out too much. Going out and socializing became excessive. The participants enjoyed socializing but it interfered with their academic activities. The participants were unable to manage their time effectively between social and academic activities.

Karen, Betty, Stacy, Sue, Megan, Ellen, and Paige also described drinking alcohol. Such an activity was illegal. All of the participants stated they enjoyed the social environment related to the "bar" atmosphere. Alcohol use seemed to be closely related to being a college student even though such an activity detrimentally impacted on other aspects of the participants' lives. For example, Sue described a situation where she had the "shakes" when she did not have any alcohol to drink. To avoid the "shakes," Sue drank more alcohol. Sue slept in after a night of drinking instead of going to class.

Excessive alcohol use and intoxication, with the college age population, can expose a person to dangerous situations. Acquaintance sexual assault occurs more frequently when the assailant and victim have been drinking (Ransdell, 1990). Megan described an instance where she was in a sexually awkward situation after being picked up at a bar. Megan was lucky to leave the

situation physically unharmed. Inappropriate use of alcohol and underage drinking is a negative aspect of the social community described by the participants.

The network that "supports" the participants also helps maintain many of the habits that may lead to their inability to commit to an identity. Such activities do not foster a complete sense of who they are as college students. The college environment did not foster student development among all of the participants. Sue and Paige did not return to the University for another semester. The data raise questions about the quality of life for the participants.

Ellen, Cheryl, Karen, Betty, Stacy, Paige, Megan, and Sue also described feeling more responsible for their actions while at college compared to high school. They felt they had to be responsible adults. Along with the participants feeling a greater sense of responsibility, they also described the desire to be less dependent upon parents and more independent in taking care of their daily needs. Academic concerns also came to the forefront when mid-term grades were returned. The participants felt a greater amount of academic pressure in college compared to high school. This "pressure" was related to their fear of failure, an experience that they did not describe as high school students.

Chickering's theory of development seems to be similar to my findings, but development does not occur in such a "step-like" fashion as Chickering describes. My findings have shown that growth occurs in a more fluid manner. Development does not occur as a rigid process but is more of a flowing process. The themes that dealt with "Going Out In College" and "Meeting People In College" related to Chickering's vector of "Developing (interpersonal) competence." The theme of "Academic Pressures" related to Chickering's vector on "Developing (intellectual) competence" but, mid-way through the semester, the women began to doubt their academic abilities, before developing a sense of competence. "The Impact of College Friends" as a theme related to Chickering's vectors of "Developing mature interpersonal relationships" and "Managing emotions." Chickering's vector on "Moving through autonomy toward interdependence" related well to the themes "On Your Own: The Responsibility of Being Mature" and "Learning to be Independent." Lastly, the theme labeled "Residence Hall as Community" related to Chickering's

vector, "Developing mature interpersonal relationships." Chickering's first four vectors seem to describe the experiences of first year female college students.

Gilligan's theory posits that women have a "different voice" than men. Women have a "care and responsibility voice" whereas men favor a "justice voice". Women base moral decisions on caring and supporting or fostering a relationship. Chickering felt this idea of the "caring voice" was similar to his third vector. In fact, the participants described building supportive friendships and constructing a sense of community in their residence halls. Megan, Paige, Sue, Ellen, and Cheryl cared about their floormates and friends. They enjoyed cooperation in lieu of competition, again demonstrating the ability to care and work together.

Belenky and associates described three main themes specifically addressing the development of college age females. The participants described, at first feeling academically incompetent but realized changes needed to be made in order to sustain an acceptable grade point average. Such changes as dropping classes or changing one's major was the beginning of understanding one's abilities to intellectually grow. The participants understood they had the ability to make decisions concerning their intellectual growth. Belenky labeled this theme, "Confirmation of the Self as Knower." This theme also relates to Chickering's first vector, "Developing competence."

Most importantly, the theories described above are limited in terms of their explanation of relational networks on development. I have tried to demonstrate that Chickering's theory of student development, for the most part, does describe the development of female college students. The two assumptions stated earlier are not accurate, in light of the belief that Chickering's theory is similar, given my findings. Both traditional views and female oriented views add to the literature pertaining to female student development but none capture the complexity represented in the experiences of the five participants described in this research.

Implications: Fostering Student Development

The participants discussed "going out," "meeting people," and establishing friends as an important process of being a college student. As part of an attempt toward building the academic side of identity, such activities should be fostered in an academic setting. Megan, Sue, Cheryl, Ellen, and Paige already have learned to "go out" and "meet people" in the residence halls, such behavior now needs to occur in the classroom. Learning environments should be created that invite a sense of academic community. The participants created relational networks related to their social activities but this rarely occurred in their academic lives. The participants felt that being an academic student was an individual process. I propose that relational networks be established in a student's academic activities, by which he or she can have a network of academic support. For example, a university may house together students who have the same major. This may foster a greater sense of academic community because all the students will have shared academic involvement, as well as, a similar social setting.

It is important that a student feels that he or she counts as a person and not as a number in the classroom. Classroom size should be limited so as to optimize teacher-student interactions. The students should feel they are part of a learning community with a caring instructor. Small group interactions should be part of the instructional format. Professor dominated instruction (lecture) does not foster a sense of group membership and interactive learning. Mid-term grade reports should be moved to the first one-third of the semester and two-thirds into the semester. The participants felt that by mid-semester they had limited options available to increase their grades. Four out of the five participants dropped a course after mid-term and two participants withdrew from the university. Earlier notice may have given the participants more options and time to seek assistance and/or improve academic performance.

Social functions (parties, dances, and service organizations) should be made more prominent, active, and organized around campus life. Academic clubs should accept members as

part of their organization without strict academic requirements (i.e., high grade point average). Such requirements should be based on participation and network building. Strict academic requirements may pose barriers to participation for the very people who need the relational support the most.

College instructors and administrators should be available to students. Administrators and faculty should have weekly open office hours where students can walk-in without an appointment to discuss issues related to their studies. Faculty and administrators should be appropriate role models and provide an environment that promotes student development. Faculty should also provide accurate course advisement to students. Such an activity should have great value because decisions regarding a student's class schedule will impact a student's experiences at college. Instructors should be rewarded not only for excellent teaching, but for other forms of student involvement.

Instructional activities can also be developed that support this idea of relational networks in the classroom. Activities that promote social interactions such as group activities, peer teaching, student to student mentoring programs, and peer support groups may contribute to the establishment of relational networks. The key is to have a student believe that he or she is part of an academic relational network. Being "academic" will no longer be considered an individual process but a group process where one is connected to a community.

Orientation programs, as well as, academic support programs should have as part of their instructional design, a section on time management and study skills. The participants described a struggle toward learning to be more responsible (Theme: "On Your Own: The Responsibility of Being Mature"). Programs in the above stated area can aid a student to become more academically responsible. Also, students should have the opportunity to experience life skills (paying bills, checking accounts, laundry, etc.) on a small scale before being thrusted into an environment where they must fend for their own survival.

An institution should also address the issue of underage drinking. Such interventions should go beyond just trying to stop students from using alcohol. Programs should be developed

that educate students, staff, and faculty about appropriate alcohol use and the dangers involved when alcohol is used inappropriately. Issues related to alcohol abuse such as sexual assault, other types of drug abuse, and sexually dangerous behaviors which could include unprotected sexual intercourse should be addressed. Public (university community) health education should be part of the prevention/education program. High school behavior is also an influential factor in determining certain behaviors in college. If drug use was present during high school it may also be present during college. Alcohol use is found to depress inhibitions, in turn, risk taking behavior increases. Students should be aware of such possibilities. Peer education programs can also be developed to address the abuse of alcohol on college campuses.

The residence hall community should also enforce established rules and regulations in a fair, just, and quick manner. The participants often spoke about the loud noise in the residence hall and how policies were not enforced. The students should be held accountable for inappropriate behavior.

A university or college should also establish student assistance programs that address inappropriate alcohol use. Such programs should be independent of counseling services so students do not feel stigmatized for going to the programs. Other types of student assistance programs should address the academic concerns related to college. Writing, math, and reading laboratories should be established to aid students who are having difficulty in these areas.

College can be an exciting and adventurous time for a student. The participants echoed a modified version of the following statement, as told by their parents, "college is supposed to be the best time of your life." Many of the participants were waiting for the "best" times to begin.

There is not a single theory that completely captures the process of college student development. Erikson, Chickering, Perry, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Belenky, and Eisenhart have all contributed to the process of college student development by creating a theory that expands our understanding of college student growth. In theory, each of the primary assumptions created by the authors and discussed in this paper have something to add to each other's theory. Basically, there are many similarities between the theories. Chickering's theory seems to best describe the

experiences of female college student development, more than any other theory discussed, when my findings are taken into account.

This study describes in detail the experiences and prominent themes expressed by first year female college students. It is a narrative told to me by them as expressed through their voices and seen through their eyes. This narrative outlines the journey of first year female college students as they progress through a transition from their first semester into their second semester of college. The transition is a growth filled process where the women have learned to live outside the home of origin, be independent, establish social networks, learn life skills, and most of all, strive to understand themselves in the context of life.

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